NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

Contour Farming

(Acre)

Code 330

DEFINITION

Farming sloping land in such a way that plowing, preparing land, planting, and cultivating are done on the contour. (This includes following established grades of terraces or diversions.)

PURPOSES

To reduce erosion and control water.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On sloping cropland and on recreation and wildlife areas where other practices in the cropping systems do not control soil and water loss.

CRITERIA

CONSIDERATIONS

Water Quantity

1. Effects on the water budget, especially on volume and rates of runoff and infiltration.

2. Potential for a change in plant growth and transpiration because of changes in the volume of soil water.

Water Quality

1. Potential for development of saline seeps or other salinity problems resulting from increased infiltration in the presence of restrictive layers.

2. Effects on erosion and the movement of sediment, pathogens, and soluble and sediment-attached substances carried by runoff.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

1. The Universal Soil Loss Equation shall be used to determine adequacy of erosion control with contouring.

2. Obstruction removal:

   Fences or other obstructions in fields should be removed or relocated to facilitate the establishment of contour guidelines

3. Establishment:

   a. Areas with established contour guidelines:

      Tillage and planting operations should be parallel to diversions, terraces, fences, or other established contour guidelines, provided maximum deviations are not exceeded.

   b. Area without established contour guidelines:

      Contour guidelines should be laid out across the principal slope on or near the

general contour with a grade not to exceed 2 percent.

In order to maintain farming operations parallel to terraces, diversions, other established contour lines, or to reach a satisfactory outlet grade may be increased to 3 percent for reaches of up to 100 feet.

4. Contour guidelines for soils with tight subsoils shall be established on a slight grade (0.4 to 1 percent) toward grassed waterways or other stable outlet.

5. Grassed waterways, water and sediment control structures, terraces or diversions should be established and maintained where water flow would otherwise cause sheet and/or gully erosion.

6. Farming operations should start on the contour guidelines and progress toward the center (between guidelines) where short rows, if any should be placed.

7. Contour rows should outlet into a stable outlet such as waterway, water and sediment control basin, field border or other nonerosive area. Contour rows will not outlet into end rows where excessive erosion down the slope might be accelerated.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE